

Poetic Experience

Alemtola

Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of Philosophy

University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

Abstract

Indian Aestheticians regard *rasa* as the keystone of poetry. It is the *vibhāva* (Determinant), the *anubhāva* (Effect) and the *vyabhicāribhāva* (Transient sentiments) which lead to the attainment of poetic experience or *rasa*. A distinction is drawn between the ordinary *kāraṇa* (cause) and the extraordinary *vibhāva*, the normal *kārya* (effect) and the extra normal *anubhāva*. Through the medium of poetic expression the ordinary causes go through transformation and they receive the recognition as *vibhāva*. The effect too, when this is presented through poetry, it appears in the shape of an idea of limitless possibility, and naturally causes delight to the connoisseur. The exponents of Dhavni maintain that ordinary cause-and-effect theory does not apply to the case of poetic experience which is supernormal in character. This paper will study how the combination of *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* along with *vyabhicāribhāva* can lead one to the attainment of *rasa* with especial reference to Bharata and Viśvanatha Kavirāja.

Index Terms: *anubhāva*, *bhāva*, *rasa*, *vibhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*

I. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is understood as expressing our thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dreams and so forth. Some writers viz. C. Brooks and R.P. Warren state that poetry is a kind of saying[1]. It is a kind, which do not make sense to many people until they become well acquainted with it. Poetry may neither contain any useful information nor any good or exciting stories but it does please us. So the question here is: what makes poetry “poetry”? Or what is it in poetry which pleases us? Indian aestheticians consider “*rasa*” as the keystone of poetry. A poem or any art work should bring out *rasa* or else it cannot be considered as a good poetry or good art work. The word *rasa* could be understood as “aesthetic content” or “aesthetic relish”. So now the question is what is “*rasa*” and how can it be brought about in poetry? Bharata is considered to be the first expounder of *rasa* theory. Bharata is famous for his book “*Nāṭyaśāstra*” which is a compendium of performed arts: drama, music and dance. He has given the definition of *rasa* as “*rasa* is realized by the union of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva*”[2]. This

definition created a lot of controversy among the theoreticians relating to the words “realization” and “union”. Hence, before going further into the core of the topic, the concepts of *bhāva*, *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva* and *rasa* according to Bharata has been theorized briefly.

II. THEORIZING THE THEORY OF BHARATA

A. *Bhāva*

could be understood as emotions or sentiments or moods. It is purely a mental activity which is not visible to the senses. The only means of perceiving it is to know its causes and effects. There are different emotional states and it is through these that *rasa* arise. The *bhavas* are abiding (*sthāyin*), the transient (*sancāri* or *vyabhicāri*) and the psycho-physical conditions (*sāttvika*) of the mind.

B. *Stāyibhāvas*.

They are the permanent or abiding sentiments. There are eight permanent mental conditions according to Bharata. The eight *stāyibhāvas* are:

1. Rati (Delight), 2. Hāsa (laughter), 3. Śoka (sorrow), 4. Krōdha (anger), 5. Bhaya (fear), 6. Utsāha (heroism), 7. Jugupsā (disgust), 8. Vismaya (wonder)[3].

C. *Vyabhicāribhāvas*.

These emotions are so called transient or *vyabhicāriṇas* because they move momentarily. They keep on moving and do not stay permanently. There are thirty-three *vyabhicāri* and they are:

- 1)Self-disparagement, 2)Flurry, 3)Depression, 4)Weariness, 5)Intoxication, 6)Stupefaction, 7)Sternness, 8)Distraction, 9)Awaking, 10)Dreaming, 11)Dementedness, 12)Arrogance, 13)Death, 14)Indolence, 15)Impatience of opposition, 16)Drowsiness, 17)Dissembling, 18)Longing, 19)Derangement, 20)Apprehension, 21)Recollection, 22)Resolve, 23)Sickness, 24)Alarm, 25)Shame, 26)Joy, 27)Envy, 28)Despondency, 29)Equanimity, 30)Unsteadiness, 31)Debility, 32)Painful Reflection, and 33)Debate[4].

D. *Sāttvikbhāvas*.

These are expressions brought out conveying the inner emotions. They are related to acting according to Bharata, expressions to convey

the inner emotions making them look real. He mentions eight sāttvikbhāvas which are:

- 2) (voice-breaking or disturbance of speech) (5) Vepathu (tremor) (6) Vaivarnya (change of colour) (7) Āśru (tears) (8) Pralaya (fainting or complete loss of consciousness) [5].

It is said that when the mind attains perfect concentration sattva is produced. It can neither be represented nor manifested by an actor whose mind is distracted. Bharata asserts that they should be included in poetic sentiments too. Viśvanatha describes these as “involuntary evidences of strong emotion” [4]. He says that it is conducive as anubhāva (ensuant).

E. Vibhāvas: are called the Determinants or Stimulants. It is so because the words, physical gestures and the psycho physical acting which are connected with the representation of permanent and transitory mental states are specifically determined by vibhāvante. Vibhāvas can be understood as the cause (kāraṇa), instrument or the reason. For example, vibhāvas of bhayānaka rasa are like “ghastly noises, seeing of supernatural beings, fear or panic due to the cry of owls, jackals, going to an empty house or forest” [6]. They can be directly grasped by the sense and will lead to the generation of an emotional state which will in turn result in an emotion or state of mind (bhāva) and its consequences (anubhāvas).

F. Anubhāvas: are understood as the consequents or the effect. When through words, physical gestures and sattva acting is made to be felt as an after-effect of the impact of the emotional determinant then anubhāva is rendered. It is the outward manifestation of the inward emotional states. Anubhāvas of fear is like “violent changes of the limbs, the eyes or the face, such as paralysis of the legs, looking about in panic, collapsing, drying of the mouth and palpitation of the heart, and horripilation” [6].

G. Rasa: as relating to the eight permanent bhāvas, Bharata describes the eight rasa or the rhetorical sentiments recognised in drama and dramatic representation. They are:

Śṛgāra (erotic), Hāsya (comic), Karuṇa (pathetic), Raudra (furious), Vīra (heroic), Bhayanaka (terrible), Vibhatsa (odious), Adbhuta (marvellous). Later śānta (quiet) with its corresponding śāntarasa (quietistic) was also considered as the ninth or one of the primary or permanent mental states. Critics like Udbhata, Masson and Rudrata included this ninth rasa. Viśvanatha has also explained this by saying that it is the mood which esteems the very best of man.

The term rasa has two significant meaning. One could be understood as “aesthetic content” of literary art and the other could be taken as “aesthetic relish” which the reader-spectator enjoys. Rasa arise

- 1) Stambha (paralysis) (2) Sveda (Perspiration) (3) Romāñcha (horripilation) (4) Svarabhanga

from an appropriate combination of the determinants, its consequents and the transient emotional states. Their relationship is creatively explained by the example as: when different spicy foodstuffs, leafy vegetables and other articles of food are properly combined and cooked, they produce a tasty flavour (rasa). Similarly, when different emotional states like vibhāva, anubhāva, and vyabhicāribhāva are combined together they give aesthetic relish. But they become relishable only when the various emotional states reach the abiding sentiments (sthāyibhāva). So one may ask here which comes first: bhāvas or rasa. Bharata has claimed that bhāvas gives rise to rasa but not vice-versa. But Abhinavagupta has pointed out that the concept of bhāva comes into existence only because of the concept of rasa. Bhāva is held in rasa and therefore a mutual dependence relation is perceived [6].

Bhaṭṭa Lollata, Śaṅkuka, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta are the four commentators on the work of Bharata. All these commentators agreed that it is the vibhāva, anubhāva, and vyabhicāribhāva that lead to the attainment of rasa but their interpretations of his theory varies. According to Bhaṭṭa Lollata, intensified permanent emotive state is rasa. He states that the vibhāvas are the cause of the birth of feeling which constitute the sthāyibhāva. The sthāyin is already there in the subconscious mental sphere of the character, and it is called up by a particular significant situation. Further, the reactions or emotive state of the character as according to the situation, are actually which precedes the situation. This is accompanied by transient feelings like joy, eagerness, doubt, etc. which enlivens the situation and help in bringing out the sthāyin which is in the form of latent impressions. Thus, rasa is the heightened or intensified sthāyin. Śaṅkuka tried to bring out the spectators' role in bringing out rasa which Lollata had ignored. He defined rasa as “a nature of imitation”, which is based on the apprehension of the spectator, or on the actor, or on an objective rationalist approach, or in keeping with the dictum of Bharata [7]. According to him rasa results from the actor's skilful imitation of the character like Rāma and the spectator's apprehension of the situation is a unique kind of experience, quite different from any usual category of worldly knowledge. The actor's imitation gives the spectator delight, as he can infer the character's emotion on the strength of this imitation. He maintains that sthāyin itself is rasa as Lollata did, but for him it is not the sthāyin of the character in the play nor realization or apprehension of rasa belongs to that same character. The sthāyin in the play belongs to the actor which is the imitation of the character's sthāyin. Therefore for him, since it is an imitation of the character's sthāyin, it has been named as rasa. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka has questioned on the

word “birth” used by Bharata, on how are we to understand this word. He says that it cannot be understood in terms of being perceived, or produced, or manifested. According to him, the generalization or universalization of the things represented or described in poetry and drama has the power of repressing the thick layer of mental state of unconsciousness occupying our consciousness. Therefore the *rasa* revealed through this process is different from our everyday life experience [3]. Generality here is a state of self-identification with the imagined situation, devoid of any practical interest any relation whatsoever with the Self, as it were impersonal. Abhinavagupta accepts Nāyaka’s concept of generalization but rejected the concept of *rasa* as fruition rather than knowledge and the power of revelation. *Rasa* according to Abhinavagupta is not revealed but suggested or manifested. He says that poetic content itself is *rasa*, after it had been contemplated by the reader or spectator. When a reader reads a well versed poetry he is supposed to know the meaning of the words and there arises in him a mental visualization, which is free from time, space, etc. Here the emotional state is different from the normal apprehensions for it is free from all obstruction. He also continues that realization of *rasa* is cultivated or emphasized by the dramatic accessories like actors, their speeches, costumes, etc. By the support of these accessories, the controlling conditions like space, time, the knower, etc., in the real world as well as in poetry, are cancelled and totally disappear, paving the way for the generalization or universalization of the emotion. The spectators or readers emotions are heightened and they come to a harmony with the poet’s or artist emotion. *Rasa* therefore is apprehended or manifested when one is free from all obstructions i.e. the controlling conditions of the real world [7].

III. POETIC EXPERIENCE

Indian aestheticians regard *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* as different from ordinary cause and effect. It is through the medium of poetic expression that the ordinary causes undergo transformation and are elevated as *vibhāva*. Similarly, even the effect when it is presented through poetry it appears in the form of an idea with unlimited possibility and therefore causes delight to the reader-spectator. The exponents of Dhavni maintain that ordinary cause-and-effect theory does not apply to poetic experience which is supernormal in character. These concepts are mental in construction. For the aestheticians, the name *Shakuntalā* is not referred to the actual lady who is related to the king, but it is referred to the idea of the impersonal lady which is residing in the mind of the comprehender. This is the idea of the universalized lady who is capable of being bathed in the affection of each and every comprehender.[8]

In poetry the causes, effects and transient mental and bodily states are respectively called excitants (*vibhāva*), ensuants (*anubhāva*) and accessories (*vyabhicāri*). Viśvanatha Kavirāja who is known for his master -piece “*Sā hityadarpana*” has defined poetry as “a sentence the soul whereof is flavour” [4]. For him, a sentence consists of a collection or combination of words possessing compatibility, expectancy and proximity [4]. He says that the words with compatibility, expectancy and proximity forming a sentence, can be called poetry only if they can bring forth *rasa*. By compatibility he means the mutual relation of objects denoted by words. He says that there should not be absurdity in a sentence. For example, a sentence “He sprinkle with fire”, it is absurd because we know that only liquid stuff like water can be sprinkled but not fire. Therefore, he says that this kind of sentence does not convey any meaning and therefore lacks compatibility. [9]

By expectancy he means “the looking out for” or using a word without making a complete sense. It provokes curiosity to a listener. Then by adding the other word in the sentence, the first word is made clear. But commentators say that if this is the case, then, the collection of words such as “cow, horse, man, elephant”, would be a sentence too.

By proximity he means “the absence of an interruption in the apprehension of what is said”[4]. It is to say in other words “the presentation of things without the intervention of time or of other unconnected things”[10]. For example if I uttered a word today and the other word in connection to it the other day it will not make any sense. The impression I made with the first word would be gone if I utter the next word too late. As in a printed book the words written are made clear or make sense to us because the words occur in proximity or juxtaposition.

Viśvanatha defined flavour or relish i.e. *rasa* as the permanent moods or emotions brought out into manifestation to man with poetical sensibility, not by ordinary cause and effect but by the excitants, ensuants and accessories. [4] Flavour is something manifested in different character. It is like a curd which consists of milk but presented in a different character. Flavour is held to constitute a nature which is termed ‘purity’. It is indivisible, self-manifested, made out of joy and so forth. It is like the form of a deity which itself is the joy with which it is recognized by the liberated soul. [4]

Excitants (*vibhāva*) could be understood as the representation of things of the every-day world when things are expressed in poetry, drama or other artworks. We can understand this by taking *Sitā*, beloved of *Rāma* as the thing in the actual world who causes the excitement of love or laughter or other

emotion in Ramā. But when this is applied to poetry it is by the poet's artistic way of writing that the spectator or reader is enabled to experience the permanent emotions i.e. love. It is no longer the actual Sitā who is the cause but an idea created or known by the reader about Sitā which is the excitant.

Effect as we understand in ordinary life is exhibiting an outward situation followed by its appropriate causes. For instance, the gesture or the like of love excited in the mind of Rāma is manifested externally because of his love for Si tā. Even in the case of Sitā, her bodily gestures like loveliness, sweetness, meekness and so forth are drawn out when Rāma's attention are shown towards her and this effect helps in serving as causes in poetry. But when this effect is applied in poetry or drama it is called ensuant. It is because in poetry or drama it is not important what things are causes and effects regarding each other objectively, the only thing important is whether these things either causes or effects among themselves serves as causes in respect to flavour.[4] Hence, this effect in poetry is distinguished from ordinary effects.

As it is mentioned earlier there are thirty-three accessories which are immersed in or distinguishable from the permanent emotions. In regard to love, which is one of the permanent emotion, while this remains the main sentiment, despondency and the like resulting out of jealousy also results fleetingly either obviously or covertly. These accessories enhances to the attainment of flavour. Viśvanatha adds that love i.e. erotic or other rasas as mentioned earlier can also be 'accessories' to each other. When love is taken as the permanent condition in the course of an erotic composition then the comic, which is also a permanent condition, when it occurs in this course, it merely becomes an accessory. For example, the comic element present in "Romeo and Juliet" serves as to enhance the effect of the erotic. [4] So in order for something to be called a poetry it should at least bring forth one of the permanent sentiments through vibhāva, anubhāva and vyabhicāribhāva. For instance, in poetry the objects described may be considered with wonder as the prevailing sentiment, and the marvellous will be the relish of such poetry. Few stanzas from P.B. Shelly's poem "To a Skylark" can be illustrated in the following:

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert-
That from heaven or near it
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
...
What thou art we know not:
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,

As from thy presence showers a rain of melody. [11]

This poem is throughout painted with wonder and admiration. It is remarkable to see in the given few stanzas that though wonder is the leading sentiment, we do not see a single instance of naming it directly. Even in the whole of the poem, the fault of naming it is not committed.

IV. CONCLUSION

Emotions as discussed are regarded as the fundamental of *rasa* theory. The poet with his way of expressing should be able to transform the ordinary emotions (*bhāva*) to extraordinary mood (*rasa*). Poetry should have the aesthetic content in order to bring out from its readers aesthetic relish or aesthetic delight. [12] Poetry as an art arouses the human feeling within us. Poet has the privilege of describing a river as the heroine, an irascible lady casting crooked glances on her consort or a girl out to meet her lover. When the river is presented in such a way it no longer remain flaccid but finds its relation with human mind since it kindles notion relating to love in the mind of the reader. And poetic experience or *rasa* arise from a proper combination of the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas*. As apprehended by Abhinavagupta, only when one is elevated from all obstructions of this everyday life, our emotions come into harmony with the poet or poetry.

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